

Annotated Agenda
MAFAC Meeting – October 23 - October 25, 2012
Silver Spring, MD

1. Title of Discussion: Sustainable Seafood Certification

2. Presenters: **John Connelly**, President, National Fisheries Institute
 Tim Hansen, Supervisory Food Technologist, Office of Seafood Inspection
 David Long, Seafood Coordinator, Kroger
 Dawn Martin, President, SeaWeb

3. Objective/Purpose [Informational & Action]: Present an in-depth panel discussion on seafood certification and what, if any, role may be appropriate for the Federal government to play in this arena.

4. Background/Synopsis:

MAFAC has visited the topic of seafood certification at several previous meetings (see: [May 2012](#), [November 2008](#)), noting the number and wide variety of certification programs, disparity in criteria used, confusion multiple certifications can cause, and limitations of current certification programs (some are limited to wild harvest or only certain farmed species, not available to all producers, cost prohibitive for small-scale fishermen, or are too general). Following the May meeting, it was determined that it would be helpful to invite outside experts to the October meeting to present different viewpoints on past, present, and future issues associated with seafood sustainability certification. The purpose is to assist the Committee and a newly established joint MAFAC-NOAA Fisheries working group (see: [Terms of Reference](#)) on its deliberations on the potential creation of a NOAA certification mark or other acknowledgement that certifies sustainability and origin for use on or with domestic wild caught or aquaculture fishery products.

Seafood certification is a highly complex issue of importance to a wide range of stakeholders within NOAA's purview. In the last several years, the number of sustainable seafood certifications (and guides) to assist consumers and buyers with their "sustainable seafood" choices has increased, as have the number and frequency of questions about NOAA's role.

In 2005, NOAA Fisheries developed a policy ([30-122](#)) to clarify its role and responsibility to private sector certification of sustainable harvest practices for specific U.S. seafood products or fisheries. It is NOAA Fisheries policy to neither endorse nor participate directly or indirectly in the private sector certification of fisheries. Rather, as a nation, the Magnuson Stevens Act provides the framework to achieve sustainable fisheries by meeting its ten National Standards. In 2008, the policy was proposed to be [revised](#) to allow the agency at its discretion to issue a declarative public statement on whether a particular fishery was "sustainably managed" in response to an agency request based on the National Standards premise in the original 2005 policy. This approach was proposed and supported by MAFAC in lieu of pursuing a federal label or mark to be displayed on final sale products. The proposed revision was not enacted because while there would be ample evidence to support the conclusion that a fishery met the ten National Standards, there was no legal basis in the Magnuson Act for equating this to a definition of "sustainably managed" and therefore the proposed revision did not proceed.

Although this policy has not been modified, stakeholders continue to put pressure on NOAA to clarify its role in sustainable seafood certifications. Perspectives span widely, ranging from a desire for the Federal government to remain uninvolved to requests for NOAA to regulate the use of "sustainability" in the same or similar way the U.S. Department of Agriculture enforces the term "organic."

Regardless of what direction NOAA takes – whether it stays its course or seeks the legislative authority to regulate the term – its action(s) will have implications for stakeholders.

5. Options listed from 1 to n:

The Certification Work Group will:

1. Encourage NOAA Fisheries to maintain its current course of action.
2. Investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of a competing label for "sustainability."
3. Investigate the legislative requirements to regulate the use of the term.

6. Preferred Recommendation (Include action/product/decision needed; responsible/accountable party; date/timeline/schedule for action): TBD

Record of Decision:

Decision, Next Step(s) and/or Action:

Assigned to:

Due Date: